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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

20 July 1955

SUBJECT : Organizational Concept for Project AQUATONE/OILSTONE

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1. This Project was approved on the basis of a memorandum submitted to the President in late November 1954. That paper clearly contemplated that (a) the project would be a joint one between the Air Force and the CIA, (b) [redacted] and (c) that operations would be conducted "in such a way as to reduce the risk of involvement of the US to the minimum practicable." These features of the proposal make clear that what its authors had in mind was a clandestine operation with the least possible military aura surrounding it. This view was stated by the Land Panel of the Killian Committee as follows: "For the present it seems rather dangerous for one of our military arms to engage directly in extensive overflight. We recommend that CIA, as a civilian organization undertake (with Air Force assistance) a covert program of selected overflights."

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2. Current political developments clearly reinforce the desirability of avoiding a course of action which would appear to be provocative and would undermine confidence in the sincerity of this Government's peaceful intentions. This danger cannot be avoided entirely in any program of overflights but it can be significantly reduced by precautions aimed at the two quite different situations in which the danger will arise.

a. One situation is that which would be created by a public Soviet protest, prompted perhaps by a forced landing in Soviet territory. Clearly, there will be no way in which US support, at least, of the overflights can be denied and it will probably make little difference to the Soviets what branch of the U.S. Government is responsible. Nevertheless, overflights conducted by an intelligence organization employing light aircraft with no military capability, manned by civilian crews would shock public opinion outside of the USSR far less, and would be distinctly less provocative to the Soviet leadership, than overflights conducted by the offensive air arm of this Government.

b. The other situation, in which the sponsorship of this activity will be important is that certain to arise when we discuss the program with our allies and conduct operations from bases on their territory. It is going to be difficult enough at best to give them a convincing explanation of the proposed

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activities without revealing the whole truth. But the best cover stories that can be devised for this purpose will be rendered far less plausible if SAC is known to be the operating organization. If, on the other hand, it is decided to take certain of our allies fully into our confidence or if this becomes inevitable, their confidence in the peaceful purposes of the enterprise will be greater if its conduct is not entrusted to the offensive air arm.

3. To minimize the twin dangers of highly damaging public protest by the USSR and of privately convincing our allies that we are engaging in provocative action, the following are among the precautions it is proposed to take. None of these precautions would be flatly inconsistent with SAC controlled operations, ^{but they} ~~that~~ can all be more plausibly taken by a civilian organization.

a. Our initial approach to the various allied governments from whom we will seek access to bases would be made in every case from the CIA to the intelligence service of the other country (or when appropriate to a senior official to whom the CIA has access) so as to establish from the outset that the proposed operations are directed solely at the acquisition of intelligence and that they will be civilian rather than military in character.

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4. Aside from all the foregoing considerations, it is of course essential that the project continue to be conducted with the most rigorous security. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this consideration alone requires its conduct by a special task force wherever that unit may be located. It simply is not possible to diffuse knowledge of the project through a large staff and to employ regular lines of command without allowing it to become altogether too widely known. Security also requires that the rotation of personnel assigned to the project be held to a minimum and that the task force itself be as compact as the requirements of efficiency will allow. The practical question, then, is not whether there is going to be a task force, largely compartmented off other elements of the Air Force (and of the CIA) but how that task force shall receive guidance and support.

5. One further consideration bearing on the matter of organization is that the task force must be largely composed of civilians. [REDACTED] that has been developed for this project contains [REDACTED] that have been newly developed under pressure of great urgency and they involve major technical innovations. If the most is to be gotten out of a project in which so large an investment has been made, and for which such sizeable political risks are being assumed, it is necessary to have highly skilled, specialized (and highly paid) technical personnel to test, install and maintain equipment in the field. Accordingly, it is proposed that more than three-quarters of the task force personnel will be civilians and only a little over one-fifth Air Force personnel, even though nearly half of the senior personnel will be Air Force officers. The proportions could be varied to increase the percentage of military personnel but a large majority of the T/O will have to be civilians unless the technical skill referred to above is to be sacrificed.

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6. Conclusion and Recommendation: The considerations set forth above argue powerfully against the assignment of operational responsibility for this project to SAC, or to any other strictly military command. They support the original proposal of a joint task force. The only argument that has so far been advanced by Air Force officers against the concept of a joint task force has taken the form of an assertion that only an established military command can do the job and indeed that SAC is probably the only such command that could do it effectively. As yet, this is an undemonstrated proposition which could even be argued since the record of the past six months calls it into question. Under the circumstances there is surely every reason to proceed along the present line with the organization and staffing of a task force and with the making of the various other preparatory arrangements that must be set in motion. In the autumn (probably not before 1 November and no later than 15 December) a review of the status of the project will

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be required in any case as the basis of a final decision to proceed. If at that time the air staff is still convinced that the project should be put under strictly military control they may propose that command of the task force be given to the commander SAC or any other officer they designate. The question can then be decided by the highest authority. In the meanwhile, however, they should be asked to agree that a task force is called for whether within the Air Force or as a joint organization, and they should be asked to give it full support.

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